

## RECONNECT WITH THE WIDER WORLD

Ephesians 2:19-22

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The film, “Don’t Look Up,” which was released last year around Christmas time, terrified me at times but also caused me to roll my eyes. The topic is serious, but it’s treated in an over-the-top style of campy satirical humor. Since it’s been out for almost a year, I won’t apologize for a spoiler this morning. The premise is this. An astronomy professor and one of his grad students discover that a meteor is heading for earth and will hit the earth’s surface in six months. They inform the White House that they need to take action, perhaps launch a spaceship to try to hit and divert the meteor. But the White House has other priorities. So the two astronomers launch a media campaign. They warn the public that this meteor is on a direct collision course with the earth - but no one seems to take them seriously. No one seems to care. The world becomes ideologically divided between those who demand the total destruction of the meteor, those who decry unjustified alarmism, and those who deny that a meteor even exists.

If that was all there was to the film, I wouldn’t have even remembered it. But there is a scene at the end of the movie that transfixed me. The two astronomers and their loved ones, family and friends, gather for dinner. By this time, it’s been six months, the meteor is on its way. You could call this meal a last supper.

As the meal begins, the astronomy student says, “I’m grateful we tried.” The professor says, “I feel we should say Amen or something.” They all look around the table at one another - no one seems to know how to pray or what to say. Until the student’s

boyfriend says, "I've got this." And they all hold hands. The boyfriend, played by actor Timothee Chalamet, says, beautifully, "Dearest Father and Almighty Creator, we ask for your grace tonight, despite our pride. Your forgiveness, despite our doubt. Most of all, Lord, we ask for your love, to see us through these dark times. May we face whatever is to come in your divine will with courage and open hearts of acceptance. Amen."

It wasn't sentimental, it was a genuine prayer. Chalamet's character was a person of faith. He had **practiced** his faith. You don't just know to pray like that; it comes with practice. His faith was a gift at that moment to everyone around the table. To me, it made the movie meaningful. His words summarized why it was that the two scientists had tried so hard to alert the public. Life is worth living; every person matters. Sitting at the table together, they realized the preciousness of their shared humanity, every moment of it a gift from God.

It's not a coincidence that some of the best dates couples remember are meals shared. There's something about a quiet dinner or unhurried lunch that can foster personal meaningful conversations. It is around the table that family stories are told and re-told. Children hear them and even if you don't think they're paying attention, they start to absorb a sense of identity as they listen to the laughter and hear the stories: "This is who my family is."

Early in my ministry here, I became close to a parishioner named Helen Murray. Helen was a widow; she and her husband had no children. She lived in a lovely little house not far from the lake, and about twice a year, she would invite me for lunch, everything home made. She would set the table with her finest china and crystal, and we would talk for well over an hour as we ate. I was tempted to say to her, "You don't have to

go to all this trouble just for me,” but I’m so glad I bit my tongue, because it obviously brought her great pleasure to use the things that she treasured, things that normally remained in the cupboard. She took such joy in preparing these meals and setting a beautiful table, and her joy rubbed off on me. Those meals created a bond between us.

And that’s what meals can do. It’s not about the food, though good food can be a gift in itself, and it’s not about the kind of plates and glassware. It’s the shared human experience.

Last November, when Doug and I delivered Thanksgiving dinners to a newly-arrived Afghan family, the first thing they did was invite us to have tea and snacks with them. It was foremost a gesture of hospitality, so much a part of their culture that it happened almost instinctually, instantaneously, but it also had the effect of breaking down the barriers between us. Even though we struggled to communicate, we were no longer their benefactors, the ones on whom they were dependent. Now they were giving to us as well. We were receiving their tea, their snacks. We were not the haves and the have nots. We were human beings together, each of us learning from the other, all of us people who need to eat, people who need companionship...that word which literally means - people with whom we share bread.

Earlier this year I went with Jamie Wise to the home of the Afghan family we were helping to support. She introduced me to them, showed me around their home in Ohio City, and then we ate and shared tea together. It was while we were eating that the children began smiling, shyly approaching me and allowing me to play with them. While we were drinking tea together, the older siblings began showing us pictures from their phones and attempting more conversation.

In every country I've been in, there have been times when I felt like a tourist and times when I felt like a guest. The best experiences happen when you become a companion, when the walls break down and we realize that the things we have in common are so much deeper than the things that separate us.

The communion meal reminds us of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and of Jesus' living presence among us. Remembering Jesus is not just possible once a month, in this room, at this table. **Because** of this meal and this table, Jesus' living presence is a real possibility, every day, at every table. Every time we take the time to pay attention to what we're eating, and who we're eating with, and to be grateful for it all.

The promise is given to us in our scripture for today - "This means that you are strangers and aliens no longer. No, you are included in God's holy people and are members of the household of God." When we break bread with one another, we become one in our shared humanity.

Henri Nouwen was a Christian writer, author of some beautiful books, and someone who lived the faith he proclaimed. He once wrote that, in the communion meal, Jesus became food for the world. And because of the communion meal, we too can become food for the world. This is how he put it:

*When Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, he summarized in these gestures his own life. Jesus is chosen from all eternity, blessed at his baptism in the Jordan River, broken on the cross, and given as bread to the world. Being chosen, blessed, broken, and given is the sacred journey of Jesus the Christ.*

*When we take bread, bless it, break it, and give it with the words "This is the Body of Christ," we express our commitment to make our lives conform to the life of Christ. We*

*too want to live as people chosen, blessed, and broken, and thus become food for the world.*

Today we are celebrating all of the ways in which this church is connected to the wider world. In a few minutes, we will be thanking all of those who were a part of our refugee resettlement ministry this year. The money produced by our Good Neighbor Thrift Shop supports the global ministries of the United Church of Christ, working in partnership with local churches, hospitals, and schools in many countries.

And today we celebrate World Communion Sunday, a day for us to remember our common bonds with Christian people worldwide. In huge cathedrals, in small house churches, in frame buildings, and sometimes in secret, Christians are gathering to break the bread and share the cup. Some drink wine and some drink grape juice. They eat tortillas and rice crackers, pita bread and rye bread. They sing in more languages we could name this morning. We all remember the same story, the story of a meal shared with a small group of imperfect friends. Those friends of Jesus went on to tell about him, and the word spread, beyond Jerusalem, beyond Galilee, and it is still spreading today.

Thanks be to God for the bread and the cup and the story and the community. For this meal and every meal which tastes like love. And for the spirit of Jesus alive in and through us all. Amen.